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A

SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF THE

SONS OF THE CLERGY,

IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH of ST. PAUL,

ON THURSDAY, MAY 14, 1789.

694.i.22
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BY THE

REV. WILLIAM VINCENT, D.D.

SUB-ALMONER TO HIS MAJESTY.

Trin Coll, Camb. MA 1764

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

LISTS OF THE NOBILITY, CLERGY, AND GENTRY, WHO HAVE BEEN STEWARDS FOR THE FEASTS OF THE SONS OF THE CLERGY, TOGETHER WITH THE NAMES OF THE PREACHERS, AND THE SUMS COLLECTED AT THE ANNIVERSARY MEETINGS, SINCE THE YEAR 1721.

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TO

His Grace the Duke of PORTLAND.
The Right Hon. Lord KENYON, Lord Chief Juſtice.
The Right Rev. the Lord Biſhop of CHESTER.
The Right Hon. the LORD MAYOR.
Rev. NATHAN WETHERELL, D.D. Dean of Hereford.
Sir HERBERT MACKWORTH, Bart. M.P. F.R.S.
Rev. ROBERT POOL FINCH, D.D. Prebendary of Weſtminſter.
Rev. SAMUEL SMITH, LL.D. Prebendary of Weſtminſter.
JOHN FRERE, Eſq; F.R.S.
EWAN LAW, Eſq;
BRYAN BROUGHTON, Eſq;
RICHARD STANLEY, Eſq;

(STEWARDS

for the LATE FEAST of the SONS of the CLERGY,)

THIS

DISCOURSE,

delivered and publiſhed at their Requeſt,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

by their faithful

and obedient Servant,

THE PREACHER.

COLOSSIANS II. 19.

ALL THE BODY BY JOINTS AND BANDS HAVING NOURISHMENT MINISTRED, AND KNIT TOGETHER, INCREASETH WITH THE INCREASE OF GOD.

THE unity of a Church, or State, is ſo eſſential to it's well-being, that no duty can be more meritorious, than an endeavour to promote and confirm it.

On the preſent occaſion, when we are aſſembled to perform a labour of Love, our attention cannot be better directed, than to the examination of one or other of thoſe bands which knit our own community together; and if we aſſert, in this age, and in this country, that the bond of union is benevolence, our aſſertion will hardly be liable to contradiction.

Perfect Benevolence is the produce of perfect wiſdom, and can therefore exiſt in God alone; but as this is an attribute of the Deity which we moſt admire, becauſe our nature ſtands in greateſt need of its exertion, ſo are we employed moſt ſuitably to the divine will, and moſt conformably to the commands of our Religion, when, as

far as is conſiſtent with our mortal nature, we endeavour to imitate that attribute.

That benevolence of the heart which the Goſpel terms Love and Charity, which is the fulfilling of the Law, the very bond of peace, and of all virtue, is ſo truly of Chriſtian growth, that it may be doubted whether, in our ſenſe of the word, it ever exiſted before the publication of the Goſpel.

Suffer me then to require your attention, while I examine this diſpoſition of the mind, firſt, as a Chriſtian grace, rather than a moral virtue.

Secondly, as it is exerciſed in this country towards the people at large.

And laſtly, in regard to the claims which the Clergy in particular have on the liberal ſpirit of the nation.

1. Liberality and munificence are of every age and climate, and it is to be preſumed that no nation which is removed from Barbariſm, by the intervention of laws, policy, commerce, education or religion, is unable to furniſh conſpicuous inſtances of theſe virtues. In our own country, the general proſperity of the nation, the wealth of individuals, and the general diffuſion of that wealth among the middle rank of citizens, are ſufficient to account for the generoſity of the national diſpoſition; but there is a benevolence of heart directing this generoſity, which

which can be derived from no other ſource but genuine Religion. It is under the influence of this principle, that many individuals of no conſpicuous rank or fortune have become the protectors of the poor, the adviſers of the rich, and the benefactors of their country.

Their time, their labours and abilities are all employed in calling the attention of the public to thoſe objects of purſuit, which are moſt laudable; in propoſing plans, removing prejudices, and combating popular errors. Here it is that a field is opened for the exerciſe of ambition of the pureſt kind; and when their endeavours are crowned with ſucceſs, they have the ſatisfaction to reflect, that at the ſame time their praiſe is among men, their reward is in Heaven.

2. No greater injury can be done to the cauſe of Virtue, than to impute this ambition to vanity, oſtentation, or officiouſneſs. It is injurious equally to benevolence itſelf, as to the benevolent; in a ſocial, I had almoſt ſaid, in a moral ſenſe, the virtuous man is virtuous, be his motives what they may; and in a religious ſenſe, we have no right to enquire what are the motives of any man. We are neither to judge, or ſuffer ourſelves to be judged; to our own Maſter we are to ſtand or fall, but we are never to allow the ridicule of man to divert us from a juſt purſuit, or to ſuſpect our own hearts of unworthy motives, becauſe they are imputed to us.

3. There are *ſome*, who had rather ſuppoſe any motive, than a religious one; and who are inclined to deduce the liberality of the preſent age, rather from the diſpoſition of the people, than from the influence of Chriſtianity.

A compliment of this kind, addreſſed to the people at the expence of their religion, would perhaps not be gratefully acknowledged; for though there is a pride ſometimes exiſting in human nature, which leads particular men to exult in a right conduct ariſing from the leaſt poſſible motives, who aſpire to a ſort of ſpontaneous virtue, an innate goodneſs of heart, this is not the ſentiment of mankind at large. For let the mind be as haughty as it will, it feels no degradation in referring it's acknowledgments to God. Jealouſy cannot exiſt where there is no compariſon; and no greater ſenſe of humiliation is felt in deriving our virtues from our Creator, than our exiſtence.

It is true, that benevolence is diſcoverable as a Virtue by the light of reaſon; but if it depended on this alone, how has it happened that ſo little of it was viſible before the world was enlightened by Chriſtianity? It is one thing to reaſon upon a virtue, and another to eſtabliſh the practice of it among a whole people; and that which was never done by Philoſophy, has been effected by Religion.

Publick Spirit, Munificence, Fortitude and Magnanimity ſhine with their utmoſt ſplendour in the annals of Greece and Rome; but that benevolence of the heart which regards

regards the lower orders of ſociety as inferior only in rank, but equal in a religious view, was a virtue unknown to the moſt refined philoſophy of the ancient world. It was never taught in the ſchools, it never entered into the contemplation of the Lawgiver.

The cauſe of this is to be ſearched for in the different conſtitution of ſociety at that time. The truth is, that the claſs of Slaves was an eſſential part of the community; and where ſlavery exiſts, the exerciſe of benevolence, in our ſenſe of the word, is in a great meaſure precluded.

The miſeries of life, which in the preſent age ariſe from poverty, were in thoſe days all thruſt down into that claſs, which was deprived of the common privileges of nature. And although in every different form of ſociety, from Perſia to Britain, this claſs conſtituted perhaps three fourths of the community, it was ſo perfectly diſunited from the ſuperior orders, by law, cuſtom, habit, and prejudice, that their ſufferings, as a body, raiſed no emotion of compaſſion in the breaſt of thoſe above them.

4. Equally in vain ſhall we ſearch for the exiſtence of this principle in the manners of our anceſtors; that independent ſpirit which pervaded the northern nations, which enabled them to deſtroy the domination of the Roman empire, procured the liberty of Europe, and of each ſeveral European kingdom; but the ſtate of vaſſalage which in the feudal ſyſtem was univerſal, was too

nearly allied to the ſlavery of the ancient world to afford any idea of the equal liberty now eſtabliſhed in this country, and which at preſent exiſts * in a degree throughout Europe, even under Governments that are eſteemed deſpotic.

If then the benevolence which we rate ſo high, is not to be found in the policy or practice of the ancient world, if it is not to be derived from the Feudal ſyſtem of the northern nations, little more ſucceſs ſhall we have, in endeavouring to trace it's origin from the light of Reaſon, or the reſearches of Philoſophy. The moral Philoſophy of the ancient Sages knew it not; and if the Philoſophy of modern days puts in any claim to the diſcovery, it is derived from Chriſtian principles, without confeſſing the ſpring from which it flows. Nor is there any fallacy more prevalent, or more ſpecious, than to dreſs up a moral virtue in the garb of Philoſophy, which in reality owes it's exiſtence to Revelation alone. Let us be permitted therefore to eſtabliſh this poſition, that Benevolence is the genuine produce of the Goſpel, and that it increaſeth with the increaſe of God.

II. More perhaps has been ſaid upon this ſubject, than the occaſion demands; let us therefore proceed from the contemplation of Benevolence in the abſtract, to the

* The laſt trait of vaſſalage exiſting among the neighbouring nations on the continent, was aboliſhed in France ſince the acceſſion of the reigning monarch. The Serfs (i. e. Villains) were all declared free about twelve years ago.

exerciſe

exerciſe of it in this Country; and here the firſt conſideration that occurs, is to mark it's reſtrictions and limitations.

That vain liberality which runs to waſte, which the prodigal and thoughtleſs ſcatter without an object, is ſo far from being praiſe-worthy, that it is noxious both in a political and a religious view; for it is true in regard to Politicks as well as Religion, that if any will not work, neither ſhould he eat.

1. If then we ſhould examine the charitable inſtitutions of our own country, and enquire whether they are conformable to this maxim, perhaps the wiſdom, as well as the benevolence of the deſigners would appear with additional luſtre.

To ſpeak in general, we may claſs all the plans for the relief and aſſiſtance of the lower orders, under three heads, comprehending thoſe who are too young to work, thoſe who are too old, or thoſe who from ſickneſs or infirmity are incapable of it.

The encouragement of labour and honeſt exertion, as neceſſary to individuals, and highly ſerviceable to the public, is the primary object of every charitable inſtitution; for we aſſiſt the young, with the view of breeding them up to induſtry. The old, in recompenſe for their paſt ſervices, and the infirm, in hopes of reſtoring them to their families and their countr y.

The principles by which deſigns of this ſort are directed, are all to be found in the ſpirit of thoſe laws which relate to the proviſion of the poor; and this is ſufficient to prove that they are conſiſtent with the policy of the country, and conformable to the wiſdom of our anceſtors.

But there is a pleaſure, and indeed a virtue, in doing ſomething more than is required by Law: and in this ſenſe Law is the benevolence of the community, Charity the benevolence of individuals. It is by joints and bands of this kind, that due nouriſhment is miniſtred, and the whole body knit together; and perhaps the internal peace and happineſs of the nation for this century paſt, is chiefly indebted to this ſpirit as one of it's primary cauſes. The poor in all ages are ſeldom dangerous to ſociety, unleſs they are rendered deſperate; to cut off every occaſion for deſpair, ought to be the firſt object of a legiſlature; to ſhew a complacency to the diſtreſſed, and hold out a hand to their relief, the firſt duty of the rich and opulent.

2. There is no limitation to benevolence of this ſort, but where it can be proved to encroach on induſtry; for induſtry is the happineſs of individuals, as much as it is the wealth of the community.

I know it has been ſaid that this is the caſe at preſent; and if it can be proved in any ſingle charitable inſtitution, the man acts rightly as a Citizen and Chriſtian, who withholds

holds his aſſiſtance. But that it can be generally proved, does not appear.

The regular increaſe of commerce for two centuries paſt, is no mark of a declining induſtry; and if, in a country where labour is dearer, the price of ſupporting life higher, where a northern climate adds another want to human nature, it is ſtill poſſible for our manufactures to find their way into foreign countries, and obtain a preference; it is a proof not only of the ſuperior capital of the merchant, but alſo of the ſuperior ſkill, induſtry and alertneſs of the manufacturers.

3. When the poor are enabled to look up to the rich as their voluntary benefactors and protectors, the value of the gift is enhanced in proportion to the promptitude of the will with which it is conferred; and a ſmall amount of voluntary contribution tells for more in conciliating the affection of the people to their ſuperiors, than the whole of that, which is expreſsly raiſed by Law.

4. There is likewiſe another advantage ariſing from this ſyſtem, as it enables us to diſtinguiſh the induſtrious, the ſober, and diſcreet, from the profligate and abandoned. For the latter, the Workhouſe, the final receptacle of the wretched, is a ſufficient refuge. But it is a heart-felt ſatisfaction, when we are providing for the aged, relieving the ſick, or protecting the infant, to have the power of diſcrimination in our hands, and pay that tribute to the virtues of our inferiors by ſelection, for

which from the nature of the caſe it is impoſſible for the Law to provide.

After repreſenting the benevolent ſpirit of the nation in a view equally uſeful, and amiable, the nature of the diſcourſe leads regularly to the plea, which we have to offer in our own behalf.

III. 1. And here we may in the firſt place urge, that if want and poverty is a plea, perhaps no ſeverer meaſure of it is allotted to any order in ſociety, than that which is experienced by ſome of the Clergy. Far be it from the buſineſs of this day, or the object of this diſcourſe, to exaggerate the diſtreſſes of our brethren, or to addreſs the paſſions of an audience, where, though we may captivate for the moment by exciting emotion, permanent effects cannot be derived from any cauſe but conviction. Much more deſirable would it be to conceal the diſtreſſes of the church, than exhibit them. But there are diſtreſſes as far above the wants of the common people, as education is ſuperior to ignorance. It is not always that talents, learning, or piety advance the clergyman in his profeſſion; and if you figure to yourſelves a man of this deſcription, employed in the humbleſt duties of his order, what muſt be his feelings, when he contemplates his family around him, and reflects that if it were not for this admirable inſtitution, he muſt leave his wife and children almoſt outcaſts from ſociety? Here is a pang to torture a well-informed, perhaps a refined mind, and a ſenſible heart, which thoſe who are born to poverty can-

not in the ſame degree experience. Confined to a narrow ſtipend, precluded from all temporal advantages, reſtrained from almoſt every means of augmenting his income, ſurely his fate is harder than the general lot of mankind!

2. That there are improvident men among the Clergy, is not to be denied; but the general diſtreſs ariſes not from improvidence, but want; improvidence more properly belongs to thoſe who are of higher rank in the profeſſion; to men who think they have a ſtation and character to maintain, whoſe income is ever rated above it's value, and who perhaps have a liberal hand, and a generous heart; who feel themſelves marked out if they are not foremoſt in every ſcheme of Charity within their diſtrict, and poſſibly prefer the reverence of thoſe around them, to the more immediate claims of domeſtick œconomy.

That theſe are characters actually and frequently exiſting, there are few preſent who would not acknowledge. And if there are others of a leſs amiable caſt, and a popular opinion has been raſhly drawn from the conduct of ſome blameable individuals, a popular opinion ought not to be produced, which is injurious to a whole claſs of ſociety, unleſs to be refuted; and on this ſubject ſuch an opinion, if it ſhould exiſt, is unworthy of our preſent conſideration.

3. Let us rather addreſs thoſe who are aſſembled here, whoſe ſentiments are in coincidence with our own; who

look to the Clergy with an eye of affection, and conſider their wants as a publick evil.

It is not an acceptable office to ſpeak in commendation of ourſelves, but the preſent occaſion is one of thoſe which will juſtify it.

Let it be conſidered then, that we have no intereſts ſeparate from thoſe of the people; that the few immunities we enjoy, are leſs than many which are allowed to other profeſſions; that the publick burden falls equally on us, as every indifferent member of the community; that we are no otherwiſe fed by the labours of the people, than every other perſon of landed property in the kingdom; that we have no prieſthood confined to a particular family, as to the houſe of Levi among the Iſraelites; no ſervices which are not dedicated to the commonwealth, as is the caſe with all thoſe, who are called the regular Clergy on the continent; no celibacy, ſo ſcandalous in former ages to the Romiſh church, and ſo noxious in it's political effects to Society.

In addition to theſe conſiderations, there is a ſervice, which (though the mention of it may ſeem to come from an intereſted individual) ought not to be paſſed over in ſilence. I mean the education of Youth.

4. In our country, the two Univerſities, moſt of the Collegiate and endowed Schools, and many of the private Seminaries are in the hands of the Clergy. To the Clergy themſelves,

themſelves, it is almoſt the only honourable mean of extending their emoluments; to the Church, it is an advantage; nor without a proſpect of this kind, is it probable that the inferior orders of the miniſtry would find a regular ſucceſſion or ſupply.

But the great object to be conſidered, is, that the nation has never yet had reaſon to repent that the charge is committed to our hands. The national character among foreigners is that of a thinking, well-informed people; and if this information is generally acknowledged abroad, we ought reaſonably to conclude, that, notwithſtanding the inequalities and irregularities we complain of at home, the opinion is juſt, and the obſervation true.

5. The Romiſh Clergy have been accuſed, by their own countrymen, of breeding up men on too narrow and contracted principles, of impreſſing the mind with ſordid notions. Whether the charge is juſt, the experience of thoſe concerned muſt determine; but this we may learn from almoſt all their publications, that they ſeldom ſpeak of Engliſh education, but with applauſe, or mention the liberal and vigorous ſpirit of the people, without referring it to its proper ſource.

It has been ſaid, however, in counterbalance to this, that the Jeſuits taught without a price, and that the orders which have ſucceeded to their ſchools continue to do the ſame. The teachers have doubtleſs their merit in this, but the community has no gain ariſing from it; all

the

the orders of the Romiſh church are abſtracted from thoſe offices of religion, in which the people * are concerned; and the foundations of the Jeſuits coſt their reſpective nations more, than if the people had paid tenfold for the education of their children.

6. Time will not permit me to enter into farther particulars, elſe it would be eaſy to ſhew, that in the remote parts of the kingdom, the civilization of the people in a great meaſure depends on the labours and manners of the Clergy; that the gentry who ſtill reſide on their eſtates would want ſociety without them; that there is no ſcheme of Charity in the country, or the metropolis, which they do not promote by their contributions or ſervices; and that in all the plans now going forward for the inſtruction of the poor, to an extent never attempted in any other country, there is ſcarce one which is not indebted to the Clergy, either for it's management or inſtitution.

§. For the duties of our miniſtry we claim no merit. In a religious view, our ſervice is indiſpenſable, and our reward is in Heaven: In a political ſenſe we receive a recompence for our labours. That the recompence is not equivalent to all, is evident; for if it were, the office of this day would be ſuperfluous. The means by which

* The ſecular Clergy of the Romiſh church are properly ſpeaking all that the community ought to be charged with the ſupport of. And in all thoſe inſtances of confeſſion, maſſes, &c. which the regular Clergy have almoſt monopolized, they are intruders on the national Miniſtry.

that

that recompence has been diminiſhed, are too generally known, to need inſiſting on; and whether we have any right to complain while we obtain that ſupport from the liberality of the people, which we are not entitled to by the Law of the country, is a ſubject too near our hearts to diſcuſs.

Thanks be to God! the appeal to the liberality of the people has never yet been made in vain. The bounty of this day has for half a century been employed in giving to Orphans the means of a ſupport, in reſtoring thoſe to a being in ſociety, who had none without it. Every man who has a profeſſion, whether liberal or mechanical, has a rank in ſociety; and though it is of the humbleſt kind, there are many of the order who on a death-bed contemplate it as a legacy to their family, with a degree of comfort which the good will commiſerate, and none but the ignorant, inſult.

That the ſource from whence this comfort flows may never be dried up, that the wealth, happineſs, and proſperity of the people may encreaſe with their benevolence, that they may be as conſpicuous among nations for every other virtue, as they are for Chriſtian charity, that the bond of unity between all ranks may be preſerved, and that the bleſſing of the widow, the fatherleſs, and of him that was ready to periſh, may come upon the benevolent, before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, is the conſtant prayer of the Church, and of every Miniſter devoted to it's ſervice.

APPEN-